

Workshop

Engaging with families and strengthening learning partnerships: A case study

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This presentation will discuss the findings from a research project that investigated how one regional state school in Queensland, Australia strengthened its approach to parent engagement to develop effective learning partnerships with families. The Principal of Sunshine State School (pseudonym), a medium sized P-6 school in a regional town, had identified the need for gaining further understanding of parents' perceptions of, and engagement with, the Early Years Education Programs delivered in the school. Also, she was keen to include parent perspectives in the school's customised approach to parent engagement. Therefore, a small team of researchers at James Cook University were engaged to conduct the research.

Data were collected via a qualitative case study method that included six semi-structured focus group interviews with consenting parents of children enrolled in the Preparatory year level at the school. Interview recordings were transcribed and thematic data analysis revealed that parents identified three key barriers to their engagement with the school—communication, consistency and family commitments. This presentation will reveal how the participants transformed the three identified barriers to become 'enablers' that fostered the development of effective learning partnerships between families and schools. Furthermore, examples of how the school used the findings from this research to customise the school's approach to parent engagement, Preparatory Orientation Programs and parent-school communication processes will also be explored.

This research contributes to the body of knowledge on parent engagement practices in early childhood education settings and emphasises the importance of a customised, evidence based approach to parent engagement that is informed by parents.